

Windsorites rally as federal government holds Trans-Pacific Partnership talks

Tom Morrison

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Windsor labour supporters took to Riverside Drive Thursday to protest the Trans-Pacific Partnership as a federal committee consulted with stakeholders on the 12-country trade deal.

Chris Taylor, president of Unifor Local 200, said the agreement is “the biggest threat that we have” to the manufacturing industry.

“Ford (Motor Co.) has been out there, very public, to say that this agreement is not going to serve the automotive sector well in Canada and the Liberals need to understand that, and you don’t mess with your largest export industry in the country,” he said following the rally organized the Windsor and District Labour Council.

One of the concerns for the automotive sector is the change of the content rules negotiated under the North American Free Trade Agreement with the U.S. and Mexico. Currently vehicles have to have 62.5 per cent content from the NAFTA countries to avoid tariffs.

Under the TPP, that number switches to 45 per cent content from all 12 of the involved states, meaning a vehicle with 55 per cent content from outside the TPP will be allowed tariff-free.

Another concern facing the auto industry is Canada’s 6.1 tariff on passenger vehicles will be phased out over five years, while the U.S. will phase out its 2.5 per cent tariff on Japanese cars over 25 years.

Chrystia Freeland, Canada’s trade minister, has said the deal can’t be renegotiated so it will have to be a yes or no vote.

Taylor said if that is the case, then Canadians need to say they’re against it.

“I don’t expect every Canadian is going to go out and read the document, but they have to understand what the negative impacts are going to be,” said Taylor.

The federal standing committee on international trade heard consultations from representatives of various industries throughout the day at the Best Western Waterfront Hotel.

Matt Marchand, CEO of the Windsor-Essex Regional Chamber of Commerce, raised concerns over the TPP not addressing states which may manipulate their currency to put Canada at a disadvantage.

“Other countries can devalue their currency to gain a competitive advantage over us relatively easily, so that puts our jobs and our economy at a very precarious position,” he said.

Marchand noted how potential U.S. presidential nominees Hilary Clinton and Donald Trump have spoken against this and other parts of the TPP, so he’s hoping at least some changes can be made. The Ontario Chamber of Commerce has asked the federal government to put a hold on ratifying the trade deal until a new government is formed in the U.S.

Bill Anderson, director of the University of Windsor’s Cross-Border Institute, discussed whether or not Canada should enter the agreement if the U.S. accepts the deal.



Protesters rally against the Trans-Pacific Partnership on Riverside Drive in Windsor May 12, 2016.



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Chris Taylor, president of Unifor Local 200, speaks against the Trans-Pacific Partnership on Riverside Drive in Windsor May 12, 2016.



Ken Lewenza Jr. speaks against the Trans-Pacific Partnership on Riverside Drive in Windsor May 12, 2016.

“It really is a complicated problem and if Canada is playing by one set of rules and the United States and Mexico are playing by another set of rules, I think it creates another friction and I don’t think it’s good for us right now,” he said.

Anderson stopped short of saying Canada must accept the deal if the U.S. is involved, but he said “it’s in our economic interest.”

Newmarket—Aurora MP Kyle Peterson, a Liberal member of the committee, said he hasn’t personally made up his mind on whether to support the current agreement.

“We heard on both sides that, even the auto sector, they’re saying jobs will be lost and today we heard from some panelists that actually jobs will be gained,” said Peterson, who added he’s waiting to see an economic analysis.

Essex MP Tracey Ramsey, the NDP’s trade critic, said her party will not support the TPP in its current form because it has far-reaching implications across public safety, public health, food, water and the environment.

“If we’re going to create a nation to nation relationship with indigenous people, we’ll be unable to because we’ll be sued trying to implement those,” she said, referring to investor-state dispute settlement rules within the document.

Peterson said a single report prepared by the committee based on consultations across the country could be submitted to the federal government within six to nine months.

Tom Morrison is a Windsor-based journalist. @TomMorrison12 on Twitter



John Toth, first vice president of Unifor Local 195, speaks against the Trans-Pacific Partnership on Riverside Drive in Windsor May 12, 2016.



Randy Emerson, treasurer of the Council of Canadians, speaks against the Trans-Pacific Partnership on Riverside Drive in Windsor May 12, 2016.